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Strides for Change: Incentivizing Hispanic Youth to Promote Exercise, Fitness and Wellbeing

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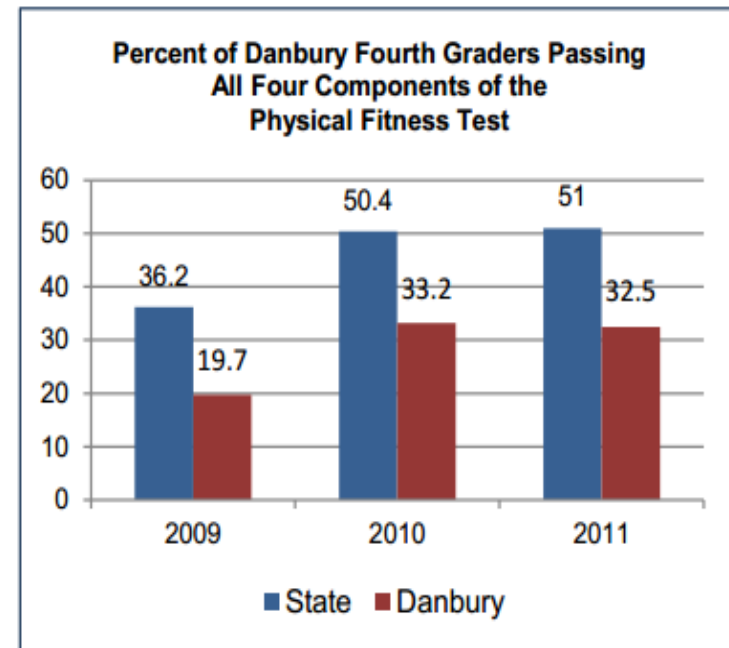
Strides for Change

Danbury, Connecticut

Incentivizing Hispanic youth to promote exercise, fitness and wellbeing

Slide 2a (Problem identification & description of need)

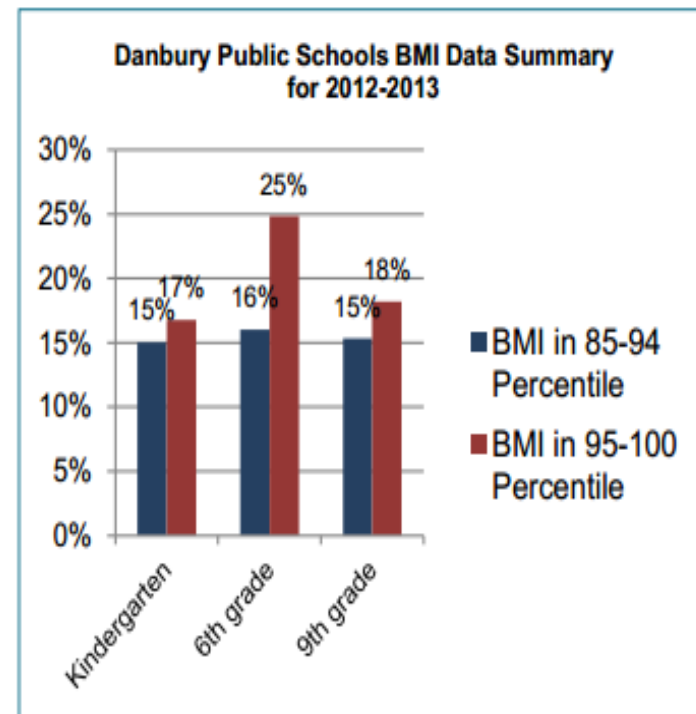
- The United Way of Western Connecticut's 2014 annual report on Danbury's Young Children found that Danbury's children are facing many physical fitness challenges compared to the state of CT.
 - A study looking at 4th graders in a physical fitness test finds that Danbury students consistently have a harder time passing the fitness test.
 - Of the population studied, **42.5%** were ethnically Hispanic.



Source: CT State Dept. of Education

Slide 2b/3a (Description of Need & Public health cost)

- The annual report also shed light on another component of fitness, Body Mass Index(BMI) of the children and a staggering 25% of the Danbury 6th graders are obese.
 - The CDC reports that children who are obese are likely to obese as adults, creating a greater risk for diabetes, heart disease, cancer and myriad of health problems – creating a greater cost on the health care system.
 - Prevention is key in the earlier stages and having more incentives to keep children physically active will reduce this risk.



Source: Danbury Public Schools

Slide 3b (Public health cost in the Community)

- The Connecticut Surveillance System track public health trends and identifies high-risk groups within the state.
 - Diabetes alone costed Connecticut an estimated \$1.7 billion in direct and indirect costs in 2003.
 - “In 2002, approximately \$77 million was billed for hospitalizations due to diabetes as a principal diagnosis and an additional \$39 million for diabetes with a lower extremity amputation.”
- Of this statistic, Fairfield County (including Danbury city) was identified as a high-risk area.

Slide 4 (Community Perspective)



- [Names Withheld]
 - President of Leadership Council at Multicultural Center of Western Connecticut/Hispanic Center of Greater Danbury & Escape to the Arts director.
 - [The president], also a nurse by profession, has been a key role model at the Hispanic center. She runs various programs at the Danbury center, including breast cancer awareness sessions and assisting families in health insurance and assimilating into the community. Speaking with [her], I realized that she works with a lot of the children at the Hispanic Center and the future of our communities is really invested in our youth. By shaping, mentoring and supporting the adolescent in our communities, we will be assuring a brighter future for these individuals. [She] put me in touch with [Name Withheld] and the students to further mentor in health professions as these individuals were already attending afterschool tutoring. [She] sparked the idea as I discussed with her to invest in these kids longterm instead of the 4 months I've been in Danbury. I really wanted to continue the mentorship and aid these kids in sustainable efforts in their own communities.
 - [The director] runs the Escape to the Arts YMCA afterschool program I met these high school students. He describes it to be a truly fabulous program that aids as a support system for students afterschool and also facilitates development of creativity and a sense of community amongst the participants. As I sat with [him] and discussed different projects for the mentees in the program he emphasized the need for more exercise incorporated into programs students participate it. He mentioned there are many ways to build a community and one way is through art and another highly impacting way is through physical activity. Looking further into the numbers, I realized that Danbury was actually targeted as one of the regions where physical fitness amongst children is lower. He encouraged me to think of ideas with the students to create programs that can be implemented on a consistent basis.
 - With their guidance I was able to connect with the high school students and establish "Strides for Change" making strides towards physical fitness. I have the hope I can keep in touch with these mentors locally and also support the students in current aspirations as well as future ones.

Slide 5a (Intervention)



■ Intervention

- I have been tutoring science and college mentoring 2 Danbury high school students ([Names Withheld]) who are also a part of the Hispanic Center who have expressed interests in health care careers.
- Over the course of 4 months I've worked with them the student and I have brainstormed ideas for projects they can lead, which will improve the health of the community they live in.
- After some research and public health tracking, we identified that obesity and physical health is something the students wanted to tackle in the Hispanic community.

Slide 5b (Methodology)

- Methodology
 - [Student 1] is a current 10th grader who is interested in going to medical school. He loves playing sports and his project was to work with his high school administrators and PE coach to create an after-school basketball game series. Age group: high school students.
 - [Student 2] is a 11th grader who is interested in going to physical therapy school. She is an active member of the Hispanic Center as she volunteers in the evening English-teaching class for Spanish as a first language speakers. Her intervention was to create a running team at the Escape to the Arts program (part of Hispanic Center program) she attends for tutoring lessons. Age group: middle and high school students.
 - Overall goal was to mentor adolescents in the community to become advocates for change as I mentored them and encouraged progress.

Slide 6 (Results)

- [Student 1] was able to talk to his PE coach at Danbury High school to set up a basketball after-school series. His coach was able to help secure time on the courts after school, provide basketballs. [He] was able to spread the news through Facebook and announcements through the high school. Not only was he able to recruit his friends but students of all skill level for a fun game of basketball. This after-school activity was offered Monday, Wednesday and Friday after school around 3:30pm for 1 hour. The initiative was well-received and picked up through the months.
- [Student 2] was able to talk to supervisors at Escape to the Arts(EA) to set up a “warm-up” time before the art projects to get some exercise. [She] and I sat down and mapped out a running path, avoiding areas that were known not be safe. One of the volunteers at EA joined the group as a chaperone for the kids and they would jog 2-3 blocks. EA activities were held Mon-Thurs 3-6pm and the runs were often at 3pm on Tuesdays. [She] was not able to get more days to run but each Tuesday she was able to have about 4-6 people join at a time. Mentors at EA were very supportive of the exercise regimen.

Slide 7 (Effectiveness & Limitations)

- Evaluation of effectiveness
 - Through [Student 1]'s initiative we saw about 10-15 boys who participated on a weekly basis for about 3.5 hours a week. Prior to this initiative, [he] himself engaged in minimal physical activity and he claims similar feedback from his classmates. [He] hopes to continue this fun and community-building program.
 - [Student 2]'s initiative brought fewer participants but a wider background and age group. She had about 5-8 students ranging from ages 13-18 years participate every week. After about 5-6 weeks with this initiative [she] said that the feedback she received from the students and the EA mentors was very positive. It was a great way to incorporate arts and exercise.
- Limitations
 - [Student 1]: Mostly high school boys but gauged lots of interest. After a few weeks a consistent set of guys started participating and [he] was not able to recruit too many other participants. He hopes he can try this at other schools that have PE programs as well.
 - [Student 2]: The idea started small and the initiative took some time to pick up because there was more coordination needed within EA schedules and having kids with appropriate running gear participate. Sometimes there were no chaperone for runs and running outside became difficult in the winter. [She] received a lot of support for the idea and she hopes to work on strengthening the program by working with the EA program directors and making exercise more officially incorporated into the program.
 - Health outcomes take time to mature and although we were not able to evaluate impact on community health, we can see that providing initiatives for the adolescent to stay active will produce a longterm result.
 - Other barriers include the winter season, which is not conducive to outdoor exercise. Hopefully these initiatives will pick up more during the warmer months of the year.

Slide 8 (Future Recommendations)

- The goal for working with the adolescent in this community was to mentor, guide and support initiatives the youth can take in their own communities.
- I hope to work with both [students] to stay engaged in the community and mentor them as they both have career aspirations in medicine.
- Going forward I hope to connect them to Danbury Hospital as well and creating opportunities for them to carry these Strides for Change initiatives on a larger scale through the hospital.

Slide 9 (References)

- [http://www.uwwesternct.org/sites/uwwesternct.org/files/2014 Community Report Card on Danbury's Young Children.](http://www.uwwesternct.org/sites/uwwesternct.org/files/2014%20Community%20Report%20Card%20on%20Danbury%27s%20Young%20Children.pdf)
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